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ABSTRACT

Contrast is one of the great principles of any art--two things that are different are put side-by-side so that both can be seen for comparison. This paper considers initially two kinds of contrast in phonics: the sounds of the five short vowels (a e i o u); and the sequence from left-to-right in sounding out the letters. The paper states that these two contrasts are the beginning of learning how to read. It then discusses the following: contrast in consonants; contrast from three to four letter words; and contrast between need and supply (26 letters in the alphabet but the need in speech of 44 separate sound bits, or phonemes). According to the paper, phonics is the information about how the alphabet works. The paper then offers information about the hornbook, one of the first tools which people of previous generations and centuries used to learn to read. It also explains how a hornbook (always hand made) can be made today--even if the letters are produced on a computer, the other parts can be made by hand. Contains 3 references and hornbook illustrations. (NKA)

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Contrast as a Tool for Teaching Phonics.

by Elaine Albert

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Contrast as a Tool for Teaching Phonics

> *"A is for apple" is a dead end. It offers the long vowel sound of A followed by a picture of a rosy fruit. What is the learner supposed to make of this?*

Contrast is one of the great principles of any art. The word *contrast* comes from two Latin pieces, meaning "standing together". Two things that are different are put side-by-side so that we can see them both for comparison. . We use contrast with black ink on white paper. We set off villains against heroes, each to make the different other stand out. We alternate fast music and slow. Without *tall* there is no *short*. Without mountains there are no valleys. Without *light* in contrast to *dark* we have only fog. We can perceive things only by contrast with other things.

Contrast in short vowel sounds

What the learner needs to hear is how "*a*" differs from "*e*" and "*i*" and "*o*" and "*u*" — those five short vowels . We could present these short vowels one by one, slowly, with lots of boring practice. Or we could set them up together to show how they differ from one another, by close contrast. We could demonstrate how the mouth changes for each. The initial difficulty in hearing and saying aloud these five short vowels can be rewarded with much faster learning how to read because these five short vowels occur in nearly two third of all English words.

The old fifteenth century hornbook did it like this—

ab eb ib ob ub	ba be bi bo bu
ad ed id od ud	da de di do du
ag eg ig og ug	ga ge gi go gu

All these are to be said aloud with **short** vowels.

Contrast in sequence

At the same time, that clever old hornbook was offering another contrast. We can hear the contrast between **ab** and **ba**. It makes a difference from-***left-to-right.*** This is the familiar stumbling block that has confused *was* and *saw* for too many youngsters. Long, long ago the Greeks experimented with this. They tried left-to-right and right-to-left, and even alternating lines,

called boustrophedon, as the ox ploughed the field, back and forth. They gave that up long ago. Today some languages are read in vertical columns. English is read from left-to-right, not just the words, but also letter-by-letter , the same direction in which the letters appear on a computer screen, from left to right, in reading as in writing. It makes a difference-- pan/nap but/tub ten/net tip/pit. Also in longer words-- stop/spot brag/grab conversation/ conservation. Confusing? Not when these are place side-by-side for comparison and contrast. The child who has not learned this ***letters***-left-to-right principle cannot read.

Thus Contrast in sounds gives meaning to language. We can hear the difference between *fan , fin , fun.* Or *--pet , pit, pot; mat, met.; tan, ten, tin, tun* We can hear the vowels better when we listen to them close to one another and say them aloud. Those little short vowels make all the difference on the meaning !.

Left-to-right contrast troubles some learners with lower case **b** and **d** . Try this-- add a top bump to each b and d-- which one produces B ?

Contrast in consonants

Thus far we have considered two kinds of contrast in phonics--

1. the sounds of the five short vowels,-- a e i o u
2. the sequence from left-to-right in sounding out the letters

These two contrasts are the beginning of learning how to read .

We have assumed that the learner "knows his alphabet"- perhaps by playing with ABC blocks, perhaps by singing the A-B-C song. If not, then such instruction needs to precede the teaching of phonics..

We make the next contrast by adding a different consonant to one of the syllables, like this-

bat bag bad bet bed beg big bit bin bib
box bog bun bug bus but bud
mat map mad man mat men met mop mob

Sounding them out, letter by letter, lets the learner hear the difference in sound which produces the difference in meaning.

Next step can offer a mixture of contrasts, like this–

sap six sun sob sit lap lid lug let log pit pop pan pup
zip jet mud gag keg mad sox rip rod web wax

Suddenly a beginner is reading dozens of words he never came across in his school books — by sounding out the letters from left-to-right. We have offered him contrasts, small contrasts, one at a time to make details visible.

Contrast from three to four letter words

Another step adds a third consonant to a three-letter word to four-letter words, like this–

sit spit pan plan cap camp bum bump net nest
ten tent sip skip bag brag cop crop rag drag
rap strap and sand stand top stop cub club

Sound them out, one letter at a time, in the same direction that the letters will appear on a computer screen— left-to-right.

The fastest way to do this practice is with ABC letter cards. Writing will do the job, but it is slower work and more difficult for young fingers. In either case, the contrast is to be made out loud, spoken. The word "phonics" means Sound. Beginners need to read everything out loud so that they can hear the difference in the sounds to match those sounds to the speech they already use. Silent reading comes much later, after long oral practice. Our ancestors used a slate, remember? Paper was scarce for them. They also read their books out loud , in class or to a grandma who would listen. Today's child may read to his tape recorder or to his teddy bear– out loud, like talking.

There is a contrast between need and supply

Our alphabet contains only 26 letters, but when we talk we need 44 separate sound bits (*called phonemes*). There's a contrast between what we have and what we need. How do we "get by"? One ABC picture book claims that – "S is for shoe. P is for phone." Another claims that "T is for thimble. C is for church" . No fair ! So– We "make do" with patching letters together for the extra 18 sounds !

There is a contrast between how S sounds next to other letters and how S sounds when followed by H. Put them together and listen—

sell shell sock shock sop shop suck shuck self shelf
tin thin tan than trash thrash trust thrust

cat chat cop chop lunch punch catch ditch such
sip ship self shelf shred shrug dash
cop chop coke choke tin thin tent tenth bat bath
cash fish rush with lunch thrash brush which
Say them out loud. Hear the sounds.

So far all our contrasts have involved those short vowels only. This is the most difficult part of How the Alphabet Works. So why start with the hardest part? Because it is the fastest. Two thirds of all English words use a short vowel. We can read so much so soon.

Next contrast

Long vowels differ in sound from their short vowel sounds. Long vowels sound just like the name of the letter, A E I O U. Hear them in contrast~~

at ate can cane hat hate rat rate tap tape man mane
bit bite fin fine hid hide dim dime rip ripe
hop hope rod rode not note got go men me us use cub cube

What makes the difference? How can we tell which sound it will be? In these words there is an E added, which serves as a sort of "pusher" to force the vowel to "say its name". There is another way in which an extra vowel put inside a word can force a vowel to say its name, like these contrast pairs~~~

pad paid ran rain shed sheep wet week cot coat got goal
feet cut cute pie freeze sneeze loaf soap toast road
Contrast in spelling. Contrast in sound.

Here's another contrast.

When there are only two letters in a word the vowel can be short or long depending on where it is. Short vowel first, long vowel last. Like this~ from left-to-right as always.

at as am if it is on up us no go so we be me he

There is another need involved with our alphabet.

We can make extra vowel sounds by putting two vowels together for sill another sound-

au aw auto awful
ou ow out cow
oi or oy oil boy
oo moon book

By this time the learner can read so much of the text that adding these is a lesser problem. Read aloud and listen. Remember--phonics means Sound. Silent reading comes much later.

We might make a contrast in how we go about this business of learning to read. Some, in great haste, demand that the learner immediately understand whatever he "reads" — as if "gathering meaning" comes first. But our alphabet is a code. If it is to be a "secret code", then the goal would be to conceal how it works. Phonics is the information about how the alphabet works. Have we censored it out of our public schools?

When the learner does not know the code, he "gathers meanings" which he guesses or invents. He has no Rosetta stone. We may try to push meaning onto the page with pictures, going back to the days of the cave painters, which history demonstrates is not very accurate. Remember Kipling's story "How the First Letter was Written" ?

Our hornbook learner is turning the code into oral speech of which he has been past master ever since he was four years old and asked his four hundred questions a day. He is concentrating on how the letters match this speech he knows so well. Do not ask him questions about the meaning. That's not what he is after, at first. First let him learn the code-- how to turn the visible letters into the audible speech. Do not interrupt his efforts with conversation about "gathering meanings". Let that wait for mastery of the code first. As he listens to himself, reading aloud, he'll have the key to the meaning.

What was on a hornbook? Why is it there?

Three reasons–

☐ Two alphabets to show how the letters look. If you recite the alphabet out loud, each letter will give some indication of how it can represent a sound of speech. Except two–H and W. Try it !

☐ A double set of syllables to show how you can add another consonant to make a word–bag beg big box bug.. The double set shows that it makes a difference reading from left-to-right–*ab* is not the same as *ba*. . Users of the old hornbook moved a fescue or straw to point to the letters, left-to-right, as they sounded them out. There's a difference between *was* and *saw* , *top/pot*, *gum/mug*, *ten/net* . These little syllables also eliminate "grunting phonics", as in trying to pronounce B as buh which makes a strange noise if you try to sound out a word that way. .

☐ The Lord's Prayer which, as the learner already knew this by heart, he could "read" it aloud, pointing with his fescue as he watched the letters doing their work as he spoke. Admittedly, this does not work as well for us as it did for Shakespeare. Pronunciation has changed. Today's learner might use a familiar book from his early childhood which he memorized because he asked you to read it so often, or read the words of a familiar song.

Hundreds of people, all ages, learned to read from a hornbook. Queen Elizabeth the First did. So did our Pilgrim Fathers. It does not take years. Learning to read can be done in a matter of weeks by using the alphabet. This is slow at first. It takes practice. In the end the learner can read anything he can say or understand.

> *"During my hour with this study of the hornbook I have learned more about how to teach reading than in all my graduate courses put together." —In-service teacher.*

Phonics is a body of information about how the alphabet represents speech. Phonics has been taught by many different methods—

Montessori began with sandpaper letters and writing .
Quintillion used carved ivory letters to arrange syllables.
Rudolf Flesch provided lists of words graded by phonic units.
James Pitman developed the Initial Teaching Alphabet, i/t/a.
Some primers have offered word-family patterns and spelling.
Useful tools have included ABC cards, the blackboard, games,
tape- recordings with accompanying books, video disks for the TV set.
How the Alphabet Works enlarges on the method of the old hornbook- with examples from alphabet to syllables to a familiar text. It shows the learner how to build the words

Phonics is a code about how the alphabet works.
At various times in history it has been treated as a secret code. when governments or religions wanted to prevent part of the population from learning how to read— women, slaves, political opponents, the poor —
All through history there are examples of how one group tried to prevent the "common people" from discovering the ABC code,— for power, for cheap labor, for religious reasons..

Phonics is a code that has been taught by various methods. One, used for centuries, was the horn book. An old hornbook might cost you a small fortune or you might find it at a yard sale. It was always a hand-made article which can be made at home today. Here's a how to do it— Start with the paper face. The earliest examples were hand-lettered. Before the end of the 15th century the horn book face was one of the first products of the printing press in England.

Ours today can be produced on any computer or can still be hand lettered. For the paddle, a thin piece of plywood can be cut out with a jig saw. Sandpapering the edge makes a neat finish. The wooden paddle can be stained with *Kitchen Bouquet* ® from the pantry shelf. The paper face can be applied and covered with clear nail polish. What size ? Old time horn books tended to be quite small for they were covered with a transparent layer taken from the cow's horn. Yet some were large enough to serve as the paddle for game of shuttlecock. The paddle, as an object, appeals to the children and is sturdy for rugged use.

Short list

Folmsbee, Beulah: A Little History of the Horn-book [The Horn Book, Inc. Boston, 1942]

Tuer, Andrew W: History of the Horn Book [1897 Benjamin Blom 1968]

Webster, Noah: The Elementary Spelling Book [1783 American Book Company 1908]

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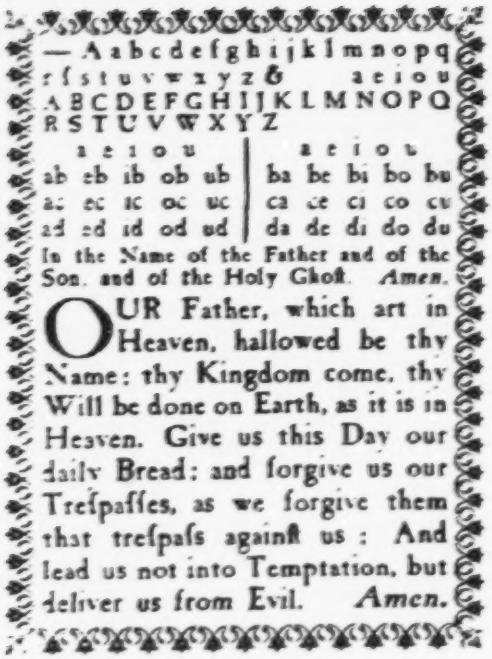
Reading with Hornbook and Fescue 1974 , 1986



— A a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q
r ſ s t u v w x y z & a e i o u
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q
R S T U V W X Y Z

a e i o u	a e i o u
ab eb ib ob ub	ba be bi bo bu
ac ec ic oc uc	ca ce ci co cu
ad ed id od ud	da de di do du

In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt. *Amen.*

OUR Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name: thy Kingdom come, thy Will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this Day our daily Bread: and forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us: And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil. *Amen.*

This is the face of a hornbook. A single sheet of paper was fastened to a wooden paddle and covered with a protective sheet or varnish to guard it from finger marks. Paper was costly long ago. For hundreds of years these little hornbooks taught people how to read. Shakespeare learned how to read by using a hornbook. So did George Washington. Hornbooks were part of the cargo of those tiny ships that brought first settlers to America. Hornbooks traveled in the covered wagons that carried literacy to our western shores. Hornbooks were valued tools of a culture. They disappeared only when paper became more affordable.

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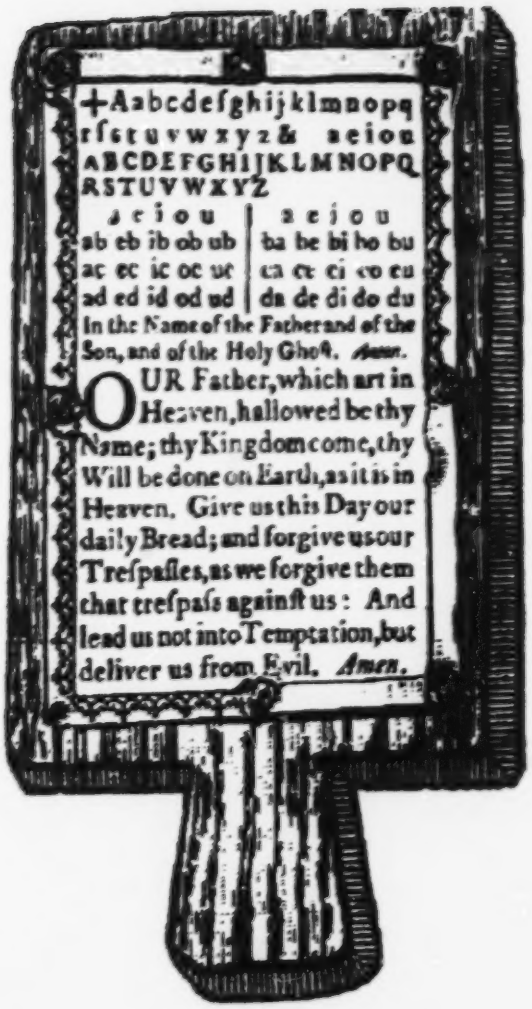
Old hornbook paddle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da de di do du
In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt. Amen.
OUR Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy Kingdom come, thy Will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this Day our daily Bread; and forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us: And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil. Amen.

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